

Tripitaka

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Graduate School

Bhikkhu Professor Dhammavihari

The concept of Tipiṭaka and the origin and development of Buddhist Pali literature.

The Tipiṭaka as the 'complete Canonical Pali literature' of the Theravada tradition [Sri Lanka] is the product of a process of growth, starting with the founder, the Buddha himself, and spreading over a period of at least 200 years, i.e. up to the time of the 3rd Buddhist Council during the time of Emperor Asoka.

This collection, as we have it today, primarily consists of three divisions [*piṭaka* = basket, container], namely Vinaya, Sutta and Abhidhamma. It is to be pointed out at the very outset that in the historical evolution of the Vinaya and the Sutta, the Sutta definitely precedes the Vinaya at least by two decades, in its formulation. The sutta undoubtedly begins with the Buddha and his First Sermon or Dhammacakka, as he 'sets rolling the wheel of the Dhamma' [*dhammacakkaṃ pavattitaṃ*] to his first five disciples.

In all recognised listings today, however, the Vinaya heads the Tipiṭaka group, because of the serious importance which problems of monastic discipline is alleged to have assumed at the time of the First Buddhist Council. [Note here the references to words of Bhikkhu Subhadda and Thera Purāṇa in this connection in the Cullavagga Ch. XI and in the Mahīsāsaka Vinaya at a much later date.]. Hence the view of the Vinaya as the basis of stabilisation of the Sāsana [*Vinaye thite sāsanaṃ thitaṃ hoti* - Buddhaghosa / Smv.].

It is also to be recorded here that it is this same Ch. XI of the Cullavagga which is recognised by the Great Commentator Buddhaghosa as being of Canonical authenticity [*tantim ārūha*] which gives us a precise account of what

came to be recited and recorded at the First Council under the [sometimes much-questioned] chairmanship of Thera Maha Kassapa. Even here in this very brief report, one discovers both intriguing and interesting bits of evidence with regard to our history of the Tipiṭaka.

Regarding the Vinaya recited by Thera Upali at this Council, there is in Buddhist countries like Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and Sri Lanka, evidence of a clear but conflicting report, dating back to nearly a century. The totality of the Vinaya recited is reported in two different ways. They certainly mean to us two different things. This difference, we believe, gives a slant to our sense of Buddhist scholarship.

A Sri Lankan printed edition of the Cullavagga of 1915, records it as ***ubhato vinaye***. The standard Cambodian version which we were able to consult in Phnom Penh several years ago, seems to be in agreement with this. A 1951 Sri Lankan edition of this text which upholds this reading, records in a foot note the existence in Thai and Myanmar editions of the variant reading ***ubhato vibhange***. Strangely enough, a 1909 Sri Lankan edition upholds only this Thai and Myanmar variant reading.

At the Chatṭha Saṅgāyanā, we discover to our dismay, Sri Lanka has not only given in to the Myanmar version, but back home, has corrected their own new standard Buddha Jayanti Tripiṭaka Text, to accord with the Myanmar edition, abandoning their earlier reading of 1915 and 1951 traditions.

The next recital at the Council of the extant Buddhist teachings, at the time of the Buddha's passing away, turned towards what went under the name of Dhamma. The invariable competent authority on the subject turned out to be Thera Ananda. Being questioned by Thera Maha Kassapa, he is said to have gone through a collection of five nikāyas = *Etena upāyena pañca nikāye pucchi*. This is as the Cullavagga would record it for us. A subsequent emergence of a listing of four nikāyas [for the sutta or dhamma collection] has led to a

considerable amount of unguarded and self-contradictory assertions on the subject. [See the present writer's article on Buddhaghosa and the Tradition of the First Council written in 1957.]

While the Cullavagga Ch. XI gives us a fairly comprehensive report about the First Council, Ch. XII records equally well about the Second Council. We are inclined to believe that in point of time of origin, both these were probably very closely associated. Apparently, the core of the history of the First Council has not, within this hundred years, incredibly expanded or enlarged. They speak only of two main divisions of the Buddhavacana, i.e. the Dhamma or Sutta which contains the basic teachings of the new religion of the Buddha and the Vinaya which jointly contains the rules of personal conduct for both monks and nuns, together with details of implementing them, and a corpus of detail regarding collective community activity of the Sangha, like *pabbajjā*, *upasampadā*, *vassāvāsa* etc. We wish to assume the existence of both these groups, i.e. the former in the tradition of the Vibhaṅga, and the latter in the tradition of the Khandhaka, from the very early days of the Sāsana, even though not in a finally complete form.

This assumption of the existence of a Dhamma [or Sutta] and Vinaya from the early days of the formation of the Sāsana is in consonance with the reports scattered all over in Buddhist literature up to this point of time of the passing of the Master and the summoning of the First Council.

From the side of the Suttas, all reports about the activity of the Buddha speak of two major items which are inseparably linked.